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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION FINALLY LAUNCHES PRESIDENTIAL RECALL
CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE

REF: A. CARACAS 02037

[1](#)B. CARACAS 02087

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MARK WELLS FOR REASONS 1.4 (d
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SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) After three weeks of wrangling, the Coordinadora Democratica (CD) on June 25 launched its presidential recall campaign committee and swore in members of its 'yes commands.' Enrique Mendoza, Governor of Miranda and likely presidential candidate in a possible follow-on election, said in a televised event that the opposition has approximately 500,000 volunteers ready to participate in the CD's campaign effort, which will focus on national unity and expose Chavez's failure to combat rising crime and unemployment. Key opposition leaders told Poloffs that they think their message will resonate with undecided voters and moderate Chavez supporters. The opposition has yet to deliver this message to those key groups, nor has it announced its much anticipated governance plan. End Summary.

CD launches campaign effort

[1](#)2. (U) On June 25, the CD announced its national campaign committee, its answer to Chavez's Comando Maisanta. Enrique Mendoza led the televised event and claimed that several of hundreds of thousands of volunteers will work in "Comandos por el Si," the opposition's local campaign committees. He was joined by the other twelve members of the national campaign committee:

Alejandro Armas--National Assembly (NA) Deputy from the Solidaridad party

Albis Munoz--President of Fedecamaras

Cesar Perez Vivas--COPEI Deputy from Tachira state

Rafael Huizi Clavier--leader of the Institutional Military Front

Pompeyo Marquez--an opposition wise man and a leader of Union party

Juan Fernandez--President of Gente de Petroleo

Jesus Torrealba--head of CD's public relations

Henry Ramos Allup--President of AD

Julio Borges--President of Primero Justicia

Felipe Mujica--President of MAS

Jorge Sucre--Proyecto Venezuela

Manuel Cova--leader of the Confederation of Workers of Venezuela

Slow Decision Making Process Hampering Opposition

[1](#)3. (C) On June 25, Juan Fernandez expressed his frustration with the CD's slow decision making process to Poloffs. He stated that bickering among the parties and groups over the size and membership of the campaign committee delayed its launch by nearly three weeks. Fernandez--who is in charge of the CD's communications committee--said that the CD's poor decision making process is also undermining the communications effort. He gave the example of the recent

television advertisements telling supporters that "it's now or never" in describing the signature appeals process. Fernandez claimed he bypassed the regular decision making process and got Enrique Mendoza to sign off on the advertisements. Fernandez claimed that if he had worked within the regular process, the proposal would still be in the discussion phase. Fernandez added that, despite the success of the ads, CD members are still debating whether it was the right message.

Getting the Message Out

14. (C) Opposition leaders are confident that the opposition will win the recall vote, despite the recent Greenberg poll, which showed that the CD and the government are at a dead heat (ref a). Fernandez stated that the opposition is going after undecided voters, the so called "ni-ni," as well as moderate Chavistas. In particular, the CD is targeting young people, women and the poor with a three-point message of reuniting the polarized country and highlighting Chavez's inability to control rising crime and unemployment. (Note: This is the advice of the CD's Washington consultants, Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner.) To deliver this three-pronged message, Fernandez said that the CD will not only use television advertisements, but also develop campaign literature and go to the poor neighborhoods where the majority of Venezuelans live. At the same time, the opposition leadership is looking to reinvigorate its support base. Fernandez claimed that the June 25 event was designed in large part to reenergize CD's core followers.

15. (C) Alejandro Armas told Polooffs on June 23 that the opposition would use SUMATE's telephone database of more than 4 million supporters to rally the faithful. Armas believes the opposition must give a vision to voters that they are capable of governing through 2006. He noted the importance of making voters understand that Venezuelan democracy and institutions are at stake.

What about the Governance Plan?

16. (C) The fanfare of the June 25 event failed to mention the anticipated governance plan nor the country consensus plan--a detailed proposal for a transitional government--despite previous claims from opposition insiders that the CD would do so on June 25 (ref b). The campaign committee did not state when either plan would be announced. According to the CD literature, the political committee--whose 60 members were responsible for naming the campaign committee--is also responsible for the governance plan and the country consensus plan, as well as the method for selection a candidate for a possible follow on election. Details of both plans are sketchy and will probably focus in varying degrees of detail on similar issues of national unity, pledging to revive the economy while at the same time addressing social concerns.

COMMENT

17. (C) The opposition's campaign command is developing an electoral message that should resonate not only with its support base, but with moderate Chavistas and undecided voters. However, the opposition has yet to demonstrate that it can translate these ideas into campaign actions. The CD's slow decision making process will likely hamper its ability to compete against Chavez, who has direct control over his Comando Maisanta and has access to the government coffers.

We do not meant to count the opposition out, as it is typically clumsy at the outset of its campaigns. And, while it is slow to reach internal agreements -- the opposition runs the gamut from right to left -- the opposition has shown its skill at organizing voting centers. But with just six weeks left before the referendum, the opposition needs to get moving.
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